Mrs. Dorothy Gilliam
The Washington Post
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Dear Mrs. Gilliam,

What you say in your "Unheroic Allegations" column needed saying so much!

Another aspect I'll get to also troubles me.

You may not remember my name but during the years I sought independence and honesty in farming you were a customer. I was in the Post's newsroom Wednesday afternoon.

Before then I was a reporter, Senate investigator and editor and wartime intelligence analyst. After my farming was wrecked by low-flying military helicopters I returned to writing and investigating, with six books on the assassination of President Kennedy and one on that of Dr. King. They're all stood time's testing. I was the investigator who did the work that got James Earl Ray an evidentiary hearing. It was to determine whether or not he'd get a trial. I did the investigating for the hearing also. Paul Valentine covered it and I'm sure he'll tell you that we exculpated Ray - which means the crime is not solved. The liberal judge held, ultimately - it took more than a year to get him to get the transcripts prepared - that guilt or innocence were immaterial.

After beginning a second book on the King assassination FOIA was amended, rather its investigative files exemption was amended, over one of my earlier FOIA lawsuits. I then sought to use it to compel the FBI to disclose all. In this I failed but I did get about 60,000 pages. Among other things these include headquarters and field office records, beginning with those of Memphis. Included are the files on the group of young Memphis blacks who took the name "Invaders" and of the sanitation workers' strike.

Failing health has kept me from completing this book and perhaps my recollections of all those records may not be as clear as it could be but it is my recollection that the FBI was looking diligently for the kind of thing Abernathy exploits and could not find it. They did have the Lorraine Motel and King's party pretty well covered, as did the local police, who did most of it.

I do not recall any reference to the dinner party after the "Mountaintop" speech but I do recall that Dr. King did almost no sleeping and was concerned about the hearing for the day he was killed, on the injunction. The FBI's reports refer to meeting after meeting in room after room. My only recollection of two women is of two white women from, as I recall, Louisville, wealthier women with a Cadillac. They went to Memphis with Dr. King's brother and from Memphis went to Florida, on vacation. Where the FBI also covered them and reported on them. I am sure that if the FBI got even an unconfirmed rumor relating to Dr. King's personal life it would have reported it. They all knew Hoover was looking for just that.

Dr. King was too tired to speak the night before he was killed. He sent Abernathy in his place. But the gathering would not accept Abernathy as a substitute and he had to call Dr. King and tell him this. (At least two FBI agents covered that speech and their other records - that was a day in which they never expected any devil loving scripture to be able to - have them referring to mature blacks as "boys" and even "monkey-faced.")

This is to suggest that to the very end Abernathy was second fiddle and may not have liked that a bit.

Bearing on how dependable his recollections are, he insisted from the first that Dr. King died in his arms and spoke with him, the first not true and the second not possible. So, I have your questions about his motives and my own about his dependability.

All of my materials, about 60 file cabinets of records and countless boxes of them, will be a permanent public archive at local Hood College. They've made copies of the Invaders and sanitation-strike files and use them. One white woman student made a year-long study of them and did a fine thesis. History Professor Dr. Gerald McKnight has done two understated scholarly articles for The South Atlantic Quarterly (Duke). He is also getting and plans a book on the FBI's files on the Poor Peoples' Campaign. I've already given Hood records - know I'll not be able to make any use of, like the CIA's on its mind-bending adventures. But I've kept the King files because if I can get help I'd like to try to return to that book and because I can make them available to others. To date no black has had any interest and no good TV uses have been made of them, although BBC just did a program that supposedly includes what they wanted of them. (I've not seen it but I'm sure they went for one of the untenable conspiracy theories.)

So, if you know any students or others who want to do research, all of this is available, with no strings and no charge, here or at Hood.

Come to think of it, I finally persuaded what was then University Publications of America to make them available on microfilm. Dave Garrow had discouraged their interest. They are at 44 N. Market St., here in Frederick. But they did not copy what the FBI called "abstracts" that I did, with some difficulty, get. They are brief summaries of each headquarters record. There is no available index.

When I was working on my book, "Frameup", I tried to interest SCLC, entirely without success in Atlanta and with limited success in New York. Abernathy was not alone in being no Blondel. I suppose I was only another white honkie in Memphis and only one black reporter, Les Payne, ever had any interest. Aside from Flo Kennedy, who got me some kind of an award for it, I recall no other black interest.

If you ever know of anyone who may be interested in making a study of the two files Hood has copies of, about a file drawer in extent, my arrangement with them is that anyone can get copies. I don't know what facilities they have for this but copies can be made commercially in Frederick for five cents, perhaps less in quantity. Students and others have unsupervised access here, of course. These two files would make a fine thesis in history, political science, pre-law and law studies.

By the way, as soon as I heard Abernathy on radio - phoned the Post's national desk to say that I recalled no such thing from the FBI's files I have and there was no interest. I was told it was a Style story and they'd all gone for the day.

One other thing that may interest you or a student: Bull Connor had an earlier and ignored history. I was the editor of the Senate Civil Liberties Committee in the late 1930s. We investigated him and as I recall his then employer, U.S. Steel, for the flogging of a white college professor, Joe Gelders. They regarded him as too friendly toward blacks. I have those hearings.

Thanks for the column.

Best wishes,

Harold

Harold Weisberg